

Hobbies

World of coins loses controversial scholar

By Roger Boye

Walter Breen, coin collecting's premier scholar and author whose life took a tragic turn, died in California late last month following a long battle with cancer. He was 64.

Breen's "Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins," published in 1988 by Doubleday, ranks as one of the most important numismatic references ever written. The 754-page tome describes in extraordinary detail every U.S. coin type, with listings by dates, mint marks and major die varieties.

In 1990, Breen pleaded guilty in California to a charge of lewd or lascivious acts with a minor under age 14, and last year he pleaded "no contest" to eight more counts of the same felony charge. News of the 1990 case

prompted the Board of Governors of the American Numismatic Association to expel Breen from the ANA, an action that was much debated in the hobby press.

"It's a shame that his problems with violating the law for a while overshadowed his research and writing," said Donn Pearlman, Chicago broadcast journalist and governor of the ANA, the nation's largest organization of coin collectors.

"His books will be standard references, perhaps for decades."

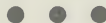
Breen—a coin scholar for 40 years—won many awards for his writings, and he had been a life member of the ANA. At coin shows and conventions, he was known for his photographic memory, colorful garb and white beard, looking something like Santa Claus in a tie-dyed T-shirt

After visiting Breen last year in

a jailhouse infirmary, coin dealer and author Donald H. Kagin wrote in a Coin World column that no one had added as much "to the sum total of numismatic knowledge as Walter Breen."

Others, such as Thomas Calder of Florida, wrote to Coin World that Breen brought discredit to the hobby and that "the numismatic world should drop him like a hot potato."

Breen, who had lived in Berkeley, Calif., received a bachelor's degree from the Johns Hopkins University in 1952, reportedly after just two semesters of study.



The 40th anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II is commemorated on a five-pound copper-nickel coin made by the British Royal Mint.

The special issue—which is about the size of an old U.S. silver dollar—depicts the queen as she looked at the time of her coronation, surrounded by mounted trumpeters, swords and scepters.

The British mint is selling the coronation piece as part of an eight-coin 1993 proof set that costs \$54.50 in a deluxe case and \$44.50 in a standard case, plus \$3.95 for postage. To place an order, call 800-221-1215 toll-free.